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COVER PICTURE: The Appian Way near Rome

NATIONS IN PROPHECY



ROME

POPULARLY KNOWN AS the 'eternal city', Rome was home to the Caesars. Today the Pope, from inside Vatican City, presides over the universal Catholic Church. The city centre, which is only two miles across, is like an open museum. Tourists walking through the streets of the Forum are able to admire the many well-preserved buildings, once part of the nerve centre of the political and judicial life of ancient Rome. Close by stands the Coliseum, where Christians died rather than renounce their faith.

ROME AND CHRISTIANITY

The beginnings of Christianity in Palestine are rooted in the wider Roman world. The circumstances of the birth of Jesus came about because, *'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.'* [Luke 2.1 NIV] Later Jesus stood trial before a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate.

By this time Rome was approaching the zenith of her imperial greatness. From small beginnings as a city-state in central Italy, her dominions came to include much of Northwest Europe including Britain and Spain, North Africa, Arabia and the Black Sea. Covering an area of over one and a quarter million square miles, the Empire ruled over one hundred million people. Historians

know the period BC 30 to 180 AD as the Pax Romana or Roman Peace. Provided provinces stayed on peaceful terms with Rome, they were allowed self-government and to keep their own language and religion.

The rapid spread of Christianity owed much to the infrastructure of military roads and open borders maintained by the large standing army, which enabled freedom of travel throughout the Empire. With Latin and Greek widely used and a common legal administrative structure, the scope for preaching the Gospel was vast. But with time Christianity was corrupted by paganism to become itself a political force. The two chief cities of the empire, Rome in the West and Constantinople (now Istanbul) in the East, developed into the headquarters of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches respectively.



The extent of the Roman Empire 14 AD

The decline and fall of the Roman Empire is well documented by the historian Gibbon in his book of that name. By 476 AD the city of Rome had been overthrown by Odoacer a Germanic warrior who became the first barbarian king of Italy (476-493 AD). The Holy Roman Empire eventually replaced the

rule of the barbarians in the West. In this dual system involving secular and ecclesiastical powers working together, the Roman Catholic Church effectively ruled Europe for over one thousand years. In his book entitled *Mediaeval Europe*, Thorndyke writes of Pope Innocent III as follows:

‘In many ways, indeed, the Church was comparable to the Roman Empire of old, whose territorial and administrative organisation it had taken over, and whose official language, Latin, it still maintained in its services, records and literature. Both were international in character. Everyone recognised the Pope as everyone had worshipped the Emperor ... At the head and centre of it all, watching over the whole world, interfering in everything, exercising temporal as well as spiritual power sat Innocent III, with an authority quite comparable with that of a Trajan or a Diocletian.’



The symmetry of St Peter's Square seen from the steps of the cathedral.

The Pope may have lost his temporal power in 1870 AD, but his spiritual powers are as great now as when the Papacy held sway over Europe in the Middle Ages. Today Rome is still closely linked with Christianity, through the Roman Catholic Church.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROPHECY

The complex history of Rome stretches over two thousand years or more and involves many lands and peoples. A period of great political and religious change, no man could have forecast these developments. Prophecy is important for establishing the authority of the Bible and the ability of God to control human history, as we read in the prophecy of Isaiah:

'Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:'

[Isaiah 46.9,10]

The book of the prophet Daniel contains many very specific prophecies. In the context of Rome the visions of the great image in chapter two and the four beasts in chapter seven are important. They give an outline of the sweep of world history.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S IMAGE

The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream one night, which troubled him. He saw a great image, made up of various metals, brought crashing to the ground by a stone that struck the feet. We are not left in any doubt about how to interpret the dream. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, '*Thou art this head of gold.*' [Daniel 2.38] Using this key we are able to identify four world empires of which the Babylonian Empire was the first.

• <i>Head Of Gold</i>	<i>Babylon</i>
• <i>Breast and Arms of Silver</i>	<i>Medes and Persians</i>
• <i>Belly and Thighs of Bronze</i>	<i>Greece</i>
• <i>Legs of Iron</i>	<i>Rome</i>

The two legs of iron answer to the two divisions of the Empire in the East and the West established by Diocletian in 287 AD. The Eastern Empire finally came to an end in 1453 AD, when Constantinople was captured by the Turks.

The chief characteristic of this section of world history as defined in the image, was to be the iron strength of Rome.

‘...the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.’

[Daniel 2.40]

The book of Daniel chapter seven also tells us about a vision of four beasts seen by the prophet Daniel which is very closely linked with Nebuchadnezzar’s image. (see chart in November/December 2001 issue page 4)

THE FOURTH BEAST

Daniel’s vision of the four beasts also highlights the iron strength of the fourth beast. The prophet wanted to know its meaning for it was *‘diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet;’* [Daniel 7.19]

The explanation was given to Daniel:

‘...The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.’ [Daniel 7.23]

With ruthless efficiency the Roman legions marched under the banner of the eagle to conquer and repel rebellion. The nation of Israel were warned early in their history of the curses that would befall them if they disobeyed God:

‘The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young...They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down...’ [Deuteronomy 28.49-52 NIV]

This prophecy was fulfilled when the Roman emperor Titus and his armies crushed Jewish rebellion. After a horrific siege, Jerusalem including Herod’s temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Jesus also foretold this event and the

subsequent dispersion of the Jews throughout the world. This is part of the Mount Olivet prophecy found in the Gospel of Luke:

‘And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh... For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled... And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ [Luke 21.20-24]



Arch of Titus relief: taking the spoils from Herod's Temple, Jerusalem.

NO FIFTH WORLD EMPIRE

A feature of the visions in Daniel is that they do not go on to describe a world empire to take over from Rome. The Arabs and Turks came close, whilst the ambitions of Napoleon and Hitler were both thwarted.

The final phase of Nebuchadnezzar's image - the feet and toes part iron and part clay suggests a collection of smaller kingdoms, some weak and others strong.

‘And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided ... And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken ... but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.’ [Daniel 2.41-43]

When we read of the fourth beast in chapter seven, we see it had ten horns instead of ten toes. In the vision Daniel saw another little horn come to prominence.

‘...in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things...whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them... And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them...diverse from the first...he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws...’ [Daniel 7.8,20,21,24,25]

ROME IN REVELATION

The last book of the Bible is concerned with events to take place after the Revelation of Jesus Christ was made known to John around the end of the first century AD. [Revelation 1.1] It is a book of signs and symbols and the key to its interpretation lies in a careful comparison of the symbology of the book with similar symbology found in other parts of the Scriptures. Similar symbology to that found in Daniel chapter seven concerning the fourth beast, is employed to describe the continuing importance of Rome in the unfolding of God’s plan. Her role is depicted by four beasts, three of which have ten horns like Daniel’s fourth beast. All four beasts are seen persecuting the saints, or the true Christians.



The Arch of Titus - Rome

- **The Great Red Dragon = Pagan Roman Empire**

'...he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.'
[Revelation 12.13]

- **Beast Of The Sea = Western Roman Empire = Papal Power**

'...it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.' [Revelation 13. 7]

- **Beast Of The Earth = Holy Roman Empire**

'...he had power...and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.' [Revelation 13.15]

- **Scarlet Coloured Beast With Woman Seated = Roman Catholic Church**

'...I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.' [Revelation 17. 6]

The visions of Daniel and Revelation consistently define the persecuting role of the Catholic Church that developed out of the Roman Empire. History bears witness to the brutality of the methods used for stamping out opposition to the power of the Papacy.

BLASPHEMER AGAINST GOD

The Apostle Paul foresaw a development that would take place before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

'Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that

is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.'

[2 Thessalonians 2. 3,4 NIV]

The blasphemous words spoken against God by Daniel's fourth beast also feature in Revelation. For example the Beast of the Sea had '*...upon his heads the name of blasphemy...And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies.*' [Revelation 13.1,5]

The woman sitting on the scarlet coloured beast was '*full of names of blasphemy.*' [Revelation 17.3]

Note the significant point of identification: '*The woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*' [Revelation 17.18]

THE FUTURE OF ROME

All the prophecies we have briefly considered have a time limit set on them to bring to an end all human rule. Daniel interpreted the meaning of his dream to Nebuchadnezzar:

'You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue...In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever.'

[Daniel 2.31,44 NIV]

When the stone strikes the feet of iron and clay, the metallic image is standing erect on its two legs, the symbols of the Eastern and Western divisions of the old Roman Empire – now the nations of Western Europe. A similar limit is set on the war waged by the little horn that came to the fore in Daniel's fourth beast:

'Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom...But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.' [Daniel 7.22,26,27]

Jesus set a limit on how long the Jews would be dispersed, '*until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*' [Luke 21.24]

In the symbology of Revelation the scarlet coloured beast gathers support for the final confrontation:

'And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast...These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings...' [Revelation 17.12,14]

The European community of states are being drawn closer together both politically and economically, structured on the Treaty of Rome. The ageing Pope John Paul continues with his exhausting schedule of overseas trips to promote the growing influence of Catholicism. However, the concept of 'the eternal city' is a delusion.

Rome, the great city, is also described in Revelation as '*Babylon the great.*' [Revelation 18.2] It is not difficult to see the connection with Babylon of old, the head of the image, whose overthrow was foretold by Jeremiah in great detail (see Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51). In the same way the final destruction of Rome '*that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*' is graphically described in the symbology of Revelation chapters 17 and 18.

'And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.' [Revelation 18.21]

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Women of Faith

Rahab

THE ACCOUNT OF Rahab lies between chapters two and six of the book of Joshua, in the Old Testament. Rahab does not enjoy the accolade and renown of her famous contemporary Joshua but nevertheless, her faith and courage are recorded in the pages of Scripture for posterity. Her name along with many other faithful men and women, is also engraved for all time in that wonderful eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews which contains a list of men and women who possessed an abundance of that godly requirement, **faith**. The record tells us: *'By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.'* [Hebrews 11.31 NIV]

RAHAB IN JERICHO

After the death of Moses, Joshua the son of Nun led the Israelites into the Promised Land, crossing over the river Jordan. This land was the inheritance given by God to the children of Israel. [Joshua 1.1-6] Rahab lived in Jericho during the time of Joshua. This city was an oasis situated in a desert region, being fed with fresh water springs and located five miles west of the Jordan and five miles from the northern end of the Dead Sea. The city was well fortified and was the first main obstacle facing the Israelites after their wanderings in the desert. Joshua had sent out two spies secretly and their duty was to spy out the land. [Joshua 2.1] As they entered Jericho, Rahab the harlot had taken them into her house and hidden them up on the rooftop under a layer of flax. [Joshua 2.6] The king of Jericho had been informed of the spies entry into the land and Rahab was asked to hand them over to the authorities. We need to look further on in this chapter to fully understand Rahab's intentions and just why she was ready to put her own safety and security at risk.

A FEARSOME PEOPLE

But to understand the background to these events, we must first go back in history to when the Israelites came out of Egypt and by the hand of God were led through the wilderness of Sinai. It is at this time in their history that they proved

to be the greatest threat to all the surrounding Gentile nations. Due to their disobedience and faithlessness toward God, they were ordered by Him to wander for forty years as nomads in the wilderness, until that disobedient generation had perished as a punishment. [Numbers 14.32-34] Because of the promises that God had made to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, [Genesis 17.5-9, Genesis 26.3-5; Genesis 35.9-12] He did not forsake the nation even though they were rebellious but gave them victory over their enemies. [Exodus 14.30; 17.8-14; Numbers 21.1-3; 21-25; 33-35; 31.3-12]

The fear of the Israelites had reached the nations who lived in Canaan and the surrounding areas. When news of the large Hebrew encampment on the other side of the Jordan reached the ears of the king of Jericho, this brought fear and apprehension to everyone in the city.

FAITH GROWING

Rahab through her immoral behaviour and by living on the city wall would have access to all the recent news. [Joshua 2. 15] She approached the Jewish spies that she had hidden on top of her house and told them just how fearful the city was of the Israelites. Rahab confided how she understood that God had given the land (of Canaan) to Israel: *“I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.”* [Joshua 2.9 NIV] We can see the beginnings of faith in this woman.

Then Rahab made a bargain with the two men and she asked them to show her kindness, in repayment for the kindness she had shown to them. She asked them to swear an oath, to spare herself and her family when they eventually returned to take Jericho. Faith and trust are evidently growing as these verses unfold, because her boldness in the face of certain death, should she either be caught by her countrymen or be betrayed by the spies on their return, indicates an ever growing reliance on the God of Israel.

GOD'S PROMISES FOR JEW AND GENTILE

In the second chapter of Joshua, we read that the tying of a scarlet cord in Rahab's window sealed the oath between the spies and Rahab. The men instructed her to carry out this simple task: *“This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down.”* [Joshua 2.17 NIV] Then comes the warning from the spies that when the Israelites return, Rahab and her family

should seek refuge in her house and they should not venture outside otherwise they would perish.

It might seem strange that a scarlet cord should have to be displayed in the window of Rahab's house but this brings to mind the Old Testament record of the Passover lamb. In the book of Exodus, we read about Moses' encounter with Pharaoh, the ten plagues upon Egypt, and the final plague resulting in the slaying of all the firstborn. [Exodus 12.29,30] God told the Israelites to sacrifice for each family a lamb without blemish. The lamb's blood was to be daubed on the lintel of the Israelites' houses. This 'sealing' of their houses by blood as the plague of death passed over the land of Egypt, reminds us of the Divine principle which runs throughout the Scriptures, that '*without shedding of blood*' there can be no remission of sin. [Hebrews 9.22]

The blood of the sacrificed lamb daubed on the Israelites' houses, was an outward sign to separate Israel from the Egyptians, much like the scarlet cord in Rahab's window separated her from the inhabitants of Jericho and the ensuing slaughter that would occur. The colour red has always been associated with sin and all that relates to it. [Isaiah 1.18] The Passover lamb was symbolic of the future saving work of Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 5.7] whose righteous blood was shed for the remission of sins, opening up a way of redemption from eternal death. [1 Corinthians 15.22] So figuratively, the scarlet cord that Rahab displayed speaks firstly of a link with sin and then secondly, ultimate redemption from it.

It is also of interest that Rahab was a Gentile, that is, a non-Jew. She did not have an understanding of the Mosaic Law with all its precepts and statutes as given to Israel yet her faith was quite remarkable. She was willing to put her life on the line by giving sanctuary to enemy Jewish spies in her own land, calling attention to herself by placing a red cord in her window where everyone could see it!

FAITH IS REWARDED

Further on in the book of Joshua chapter six, we have the amazing account of the fall of Jericho. The Lord told Joshua that: '*The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.*' [Joshua 6.17,18 NIV] The family of Rahab were saved through the unfailing mercy of God. Her father and mother, brothers and sisters and all that belonged to her were taken to a place of safety outside of the city. [Joshua 6.23]

The name of Rahab is very much linked to an immoral way of life but we read in Scripture that God is no respecter of persons. [Romans 2.11] If a man or woman is willing to turn away from a life of sin and become related through baptism to Jesus Christ, then God is happy to call them His children. This new relationship is likened in the Scriptures to a father and son (or daughter) relationship and allows a man or woman the privilege of addressing God as his or her father. [Romans 8.14-16; Galatians 4.5-7]

Rahab lived many hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus Christ. In John's gospel record it is recorded that Christ himself confronted a woman who had committed adultery. The words he addressed to her were full of compassion and forgiveness but she was also suitably warned by Jesus to turn from a sinful way of life. [John 8.3-11] Had Rahab lived during the times of Jesus, no doubt she would have listened to his words and heeded them. We are all weak and sinful creatures in the eyes of Almighty God and the prophet Isaiah tells us: *'We all, like sheep, have gone astray.'* [Isaiah 53.6 NIV] yet men and women can change their moral characters and their way of life. The gift of immortality that God has offered, requires men and women to leave lives of self-pleasure and gratification behind. In so doing, hearts and minds are changed and lives are lived out in faithful loving service to God.

Rahab did just that - armed with just her simple faith and trust, she was able to leave behind a sordid past and look forward to a new and glorious future. It was this faith exhibited in her reformed life that saved her from an eternal death. In the letter of James in the New Testament, the writer reminds us that: *'In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?'* [James 2.25 NIV] We know that it is faith that makes a man or woman righteous in the eyes of God. [Romans 3.22] But it is the outworking of that faith which is pleasing to God: *'Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.'* [James 2.17 NIV] Rahab showed both. Her faith became evident by her action of harbouring and giving protection to the spies and her unwavering trust in God.

In Christ's genealogy recorded in Matthew's gospel, we read that Rahab was the mother of Boaz who was the great grandfather of King David. This remarkable woman who turned from a life of sin and shamefulness, was directly related to God's only Son. She was also a 'type' in scriptural language for those who are not Israelites by birth. Born a Gentile, she represented both men and women who would find favour with God through faith and commitment. The Scriptural record

endorses this fact by recalling that Abraham pleased God through his faith. [Hebrews 11.8-11] Furthermore, those who would show the same faith as Abraham would be called the children of Abraham and enjoy the blessings that were afforded to him. [Galatians 3.6-9] Rahab by the cultivation of her faith, by her repentance and disassociation with sinful behaviour and putting her faith into action became in type a daughter of God. The symbolic crimson cord that she displayed in her window pointed back to Egypt and the Passover Lamb but more importantly, it pointed forward to her descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, through his saving work at Calvary.

A GOOD NAME REMEMBERED

If Rahab had not shown courage and determination to seek out and follow God, then her name would have died with her but it is indelibly inscribed for all time in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps you have never read the account of Rahab – like the spies that she hid, her brief mentioning is almost hidden in the records of the battles which led to the conquest of Canaan in the book of Joshua. She was just an ordinary woman who achieved an extraordinary feat. Turning her life of immorality around, she became related in two ways to a remarkable man, the Lord Jesus Christ. This was firstly by direct descent through the line of King David, secondly and more importantly through faith in God's promises to all men and women who would listen, for these promises are centred in the work of Christ. [Galatians 3.16; 2 Corinthians 1.20]

In the book of Proverbs, the writer tells us that: '*A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.*' [Proverbs 22.1 NIV] God will undoubtedly remember the name of Rahab and her faithfulness will be rewarded when Jesus returns to the earth and raises the responsible dead. [1 Thessalonians 4.13-16]

There will be a glorious future for all those who, like Rahab, have put their trust in God, both Jews and Gentiles. In these last days before the return of Jesus, the Lord God is still calling out a 'people for his name.' Like Rahab who showed both commitment and faith in her day, you too can do likewise and become associated with the Divine promises, before Jesus returns to judge his servants and reward those who have been faithful.

Ray Dixon
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NEWS & Views

TERRORISTS AND TERRORISM

THE NEWS AT the moment throughout the world is all about terrorists and terrorism. The world's view is concentrated on those people who are fanatical in their beliefs and who are ready and willing to kill others and to die for what they believe is right. We have seen them operating in various groups, from the Basque provinces of France and Spain, in Northern Ireland and attacking Israel from Syria and Lebanon. On September 11th last year, Muslim fanatics managed to destroy The World Trade Centre in New York with the loss of thousands of lives.

This sort of thing is not new and we read about terrorists in the Bible as well. In the time of Jesus, within the Jewish nation, there was a group called Zealots who fought fanatical guerrilla warfare against the Roman power that occupied Israel. Among them were extremists who were willing to commit acts of terrorism to achieve their ends. They had a vision of an Israel freed from the oppressor and one of them called Simon the Zealot actually became a disciple of Jesus. [Luke 6.15]

We might wonder why a man of this type could be called by Jesus? The answer is that Jesus came preaching the Gospel or good news of the kingdom of God. The basis of his message was the restoration of the ancient kingdom of Israel and people like Simon the Zealot knew that this was the same message taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. Simon was probably one of the less extreme members of this group but he could see that Jesus was a man possessed with power to perform great miracles.

The statement made to Jesus by two of his disciples (thinking he was a stranger) shows how they had placed their trust in him. They told him about *'The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel.'* [Luke 24.19–21 NKJV]

These disciples and Simon had homed in on only one part of Christ's preaching. Their view of things blocked their ears to his teaching about his death as a sacrifice for sin. *'Then he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to*

believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?'" [Luke 24.25,26 NKJV] Now they suddenly had another view of things, and they could see and understand the Scriptures.

Jesus later spent forty days with them speaking about the kingdom of God and again they questioned him: *"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority."* [Acts 1.6,7 NKJV] Then he ascended to heaven but two angels then told them that Jesus is coming back to earth again, *'This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven.'* [Acts 1.11 NKJV]

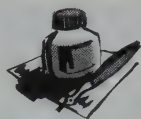
The Kingdom of Israel will be restored with Christ as its king and from our viewpoint the day of Christ's return is very near. However, for the follower of Christ there is no room for violent fanaticism but a zeal for obeying God's Word and a patient waiting and looking for Christ's second coming.

'You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.' [James 5.8 NKJV]

Ken Dennis
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Editorial

THE APPIAN WAY, an ancient Roman road in Italy, features in our cover picture. The earliest highway of the Roman Republic, it was built in 312 BC by the Roman censor Appius Claudius Caecus, after whom it is named.

It led southward from the Servian Wall in Rome to Capua, passing through Appii Forum and Terracina and was later extended to Brundisium, (Brindisi) in the extreme south. The main route to Greece, the Appian Way was more than 350 miles (560 km) long. It was very well built and marked with milestones. Surviving sections show the pavement is made of large hexagonal blocks, principally lava, on a firm foundation and strengthened by poured cement, a Roman invention. The first few miles from Rome still have many of the ancient catacombs that line the road, as the one detailed in the cover picture.

In 338 BC Pozzuoli was annexed and renamed Puteoli by the Romans, it was by this time a prosperous seaport, full of soldiers, merchants, and intellectuals. The Apostle Paul landed here as a prisoner on his way to Rome. He was met by some believers from Rome at Appii forum: *'And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God...'* [Acts 28.15]

In Rome he was handed over by the Centurion to the captain of the guard who permitted him to rent his own house, where he spoke to the elders of the Jews to persuade them of the gospel of Christ and the hope of Israel. [Acts 28.17-31]

Basic Bible Teaching



The promise to David

DAVID WAS THE youngest son of Jesse. His early life was spent as a shepherd boy and he later became one of the most famous kings that ever reigned in Israel but he was also a humble servant of God. He was divinely commended as a man after God's own heart. So this man David was chosen by God to succeed King Saul. God commanded Samuel *"Arise, anoint him: for this is he."* Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him... [1 Samuel 16.12,13] David was a man of steadfast faith; he was also a humble man, an excellent characteristic. He was the man specially chosen for the divine purpose.

A DIVINE PROMISE

In response to God's love in choosing him to be king over His people Israel, David wanted to build a permanent house, a temple where God could be worshipped. David discussed his desire with Nathan the prophet and was encouraged to do so. Nathan told David to *"Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee."* [2 Samuel 7.3] However that very night God instructed Nathan to tell David not to build the house and instead told Nathan that He would build David a house. [2 Samuel 7.11; 1 Chronicles 17.10]

Then Nathan went on to tell David in detail of the sure and certain promise which God made to him:

'And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee which shall

proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son... And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.' [2 Samuel 7.12-16]

Look at the main points of the Promise:

- God would build David a house
- David would have a seed or offspring
- This offspring would build God's house
- His throne would be established for ever
- This offspring would also be the Son of God.
- David would see the fulfilment of the promise

David realised that the promise was for a long time to come. In reply to God, he said, *'thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come.'* [2 Samuel 7.19] Later, at the end of his life, David recalled the words of the promise saying *'he (God) hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.'* [2 Samuel 23:5]

PROMISED SEED WAS NOT SOLOMON

David's son Solomon fulfilled some but not all the terms of the promise. He also built a magnificent temple for the worship of God. Solomon did sit upon the throne of the Lord as we read in the first book of Chronicles: *'Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father...'* [1 Chronicles 29.23] The Scriptures reveal that toward the end of Solomon's reign he departed from the path of righteousness and he died after reigning for 40 years. The kingdom was then divided in two and after a succession of kings God finally overthrew the kingdom during the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah. God instructed the prophet Ezekiel to pronounce the total overthrow of the kingdom until the time appointed by God for its restoration. He addressed Zedekiah with these words:

‘And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown ... I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.’

[Ezekiel 21.25-27]

RESTORATION OF THE KINGDOM

Although the kingdom was overturned, God’s promise to David was still guaranteed to be fulfilled. David was divinely assured that the kingdom would be restored. We notice the divine injunction to the prophet Ezekiel: ‘until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.’ Who was the person to fulfil all the terms of the promise and restore the kingdom? The prophet Isaiah foretold the restoration of David’s throne:

‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.’ [Isaiah 9,6,7]

The prophet Jeremiah also foretold this restoration in clear language:

‘Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely...David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel;’

[Jeremiah 33.14 -17]

It should be noted that these prophecies were uttered long after Solomon’s reign had ended, so they were speaking of the one to come who would fulfil God’s promise to David.

THE PROMISED SEED

There can be no doubt that the seed promised to David is Jesus the Messiah. The New Testament begins with the words: ‘The book of the generation of Jesus

Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.' [Matthew 1.1] The angel confirmed this when he spoke to Mary concerning the miraculous birth of Jesus:

'And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.' [Luke 1.31-33]

This seed or descendant of David was also to be the Son of God. God said to David, *'I will be his father.'* [2 Samuel 7.14] When Mary was informed that she would conceive and bring forth a son, as an unmarried woman, she was naturally



Jerusalem - the old city of David, viewed from the East, over the valley of Kidron

concerned and asked the angel *'How shall this be?'* [Luke 1.34] The angel said to her: *'The Holy Ghost (Spirit) shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee*

shall be called the Son of God.' [Luke 1.35] Jesus then is the seed of promise; he fulfilled all the terms of the promise to David.

THE RETURN OF JESUS

If the promise to David is to be fulfilled (and God cannot lie), then we must expect that one day Jesus will return to be king over Israel and the whole world. This is the Gospel (the good news) that Jesus preached during his three and a half years ministry. Luke tells us that Jesus *'went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.'* [Luke 8.1] He promised his disciples that they would sit with him in his kingdom. He said:

‘... “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”’ [Matthew 19.28 NIV]

No wonder the disciples were expecting him to restore the kingdom when he was raised from the dead. That was the message of his teaching and the disciples asked Jesus just before he ascended to heaven if this was the time for that long expected event: *'So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* [Acts. 1.6 NIV] The disciples' minds were certainly focussed on this coming event.

Jesus indicated that only God knew the time of that great event. Then he was taken up from them into heaven but two angels assured the disciples that he would return to fulfil that promise: *'... this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'* [Acts. 1.11] With this divine assurance the apostles went forth to proclaim this same Gospel message. Afterwards we learn that Peter on the day of Pentecost, preached to the Jews in Jerusalem this same message of salvation contained in the promise to David and the words of the prophets:

‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution (restoration) of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.’ [Acts 3.19-21]

DAVID'S RESURRECTION

It is crystal clear that David must be raised from the dead to fulfil the terms of the promise. David looked forward to his own resurrection. In the Psalms he wrote of his hope for the future: *'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.'* [Psalm 17.15] David's reward was not in heaven. The Apostle Peter said clearly that David is not in heaven [Acts 2.34] - David is still in the grave waiting to be resurrected:

'Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ...' [Acts 2.29-31]

GOD'S GUARANTEE

The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that the promise to David will be fulfilled. This promise to David is extended to all those who are seeking true salvation. Those who truly believe the Gospel and are baptized and follow God's way as taught in His Word, when Jesus returns he will be pleased to invite us into that glorious kingdom promised to David's illustrious descendant.

The true Christian hope rests in the fulfilment of the promise to David - in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom of God on earth.

Is this your hope too?

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